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## Editorial

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### THE CLASSICS IN TRANSLATION

The making of translations of Greek and Latin authors for the use of the general public has gone on apace in recent years; and now the changed constituency of our schools and colleges and the pressure of newer subjects, along with a rank outcropping of radical educational theory, are persistently causing the question to be raised whether, in school and college, it would not be well to substitute the use of these translations for the old-time study of the authors in the original.

This suggestion is often urged with a considerable degree of plausibility. And it is not a matter that the teacher of the classics can afford to ignore; for it is manifest that even a very limited introduction of the use of translations is likely to undermine the work of classics departments by discouraging the study of the Greek and Latin texts. The school situation differs considerably from the college situation, and the two should be considered separately.

As for the schools, a desperate effort is being made just now to dislodge Latin from its strong place in the curriculum. The reformers covet the time given to this study for the pursuit of the "vital" and "real" subjects which they are trying to crowd into the school course. The substitution of a study of translations in place of the Latin originals would mark a long stride in the direction of their goal; and when a man of Dr. Eliot's standing takes up the

cudgels in favor of such a program it is surely high time that we look to the strength of our defenses.

The reformer commonly takes the position that the student who deals with the original progresses very slowly and covers comparatively little ground; and, while admitting that a little something may be lost in the English translations, he points out that much more ground could be covered through their use, and asserts that the advantage of dealing with the original is so slight that it by no means justifies the long and tedious labor of learning the Latin language in order to reap that advantage.

The implication of this argument is that the one value that may accrue from the study of Latin is the acquisition of a power to appreciate Latin literature in the original. And here the adversary delivers himself into our hands; for he betrays the fact that he knows nothing at all of present-day aims and methods in the teaching of high-school Latin. The argument for Latin does not turn upon any one single value, but upon the *combination of several different values*, e.g., (1) understanding of English, (2) foundation for the study of the Romance languages, (3) disciplinary value, (4) acquaintance with ancient life, (5) first-hand acquaintance with one or more Latin authors. There is perhaps no better way of confounding the reformer than to confront him with this cumulative argument for the study of Latin.

Though we are thus not called upon to demonstrate that the pupil who gives two or four years to Latin gains enough in the way of literary appreciation to justify that expenditure of time, still it may be worth while to consider somewhat carefully what advantages in this particular such a student has over one who uses translations of the Latin authors. The following considerations are suggested.

1. Though less ground is covered, more careful attention is given to what is read, and the impression made is more lasting. It is possible to race over a considerable amount of English text without any adequate return. In the hearing of the writer a clergyman once remarked that when he found himself reading the Bible in a mechanical fashion, he betook himself to a version in a foreign language in order that the effort to arrive at the thought

might serve to fix the ideas in his mind. As to the amount of ground that may be covered even in a short Latin course, it should not be forgotten that the college-entrance requirements are becoming so liberalized that it is quite possible to give almost all students an introduction to the works of several Latin authors.

2. In reading the original there is a closer personal touch with the author. This is true even of the student who does not carry the work very far, and it will be truer still when our procedure in second-year Latin is further perfected. There is large promise of improvement at this point in the cordial reception which seems to be rather generally accorded to the proposal to devote three half-years to "beginning Latin," giving the third half-year to simple *graded* Latin, through the use of which a student may be brought up to a level where he can attack a Latin author with some confidence, and proceed to read that author at a rate of speed calculated to foster interest.

3. There is a peculiar intellectual pleasure arising from the sense of personal discovery which can be gained only through dealing with the original. In other fields, the reformer is willing to admit that intellectual pleasure is a worthy aim in study. He is ready to put into a student's hands a textbook on astronomy, though the pupil may never have any "practical" use for the knowledge to be gained from the book; and he is willing even to escort the student to the observatory, where, with his own eyes, the latter may view the wonders of the heavens through a telescope. If this intellectual pleasure is a worthy aim in itself, why is not the same true of the intellectual pleasure to be derived from dealing with a Latin author in the original?

4. Something, at any rate, is lost in an English translation however good. So far as the classic authors are regarded as merely storehouses of statements of fact, it is true that the facts set forth by them can be enumerated in English; but this leaves out of account the *form of expression*, which is a critically important thing and which often cannot be represented in translation. The reformer will retort, perhaps, that few students develop enough power in reading Latin to appreciate such niceties as this; but let us not be hasty in accepting that judgment. Too often it seems

to be based upon a failure to distinguish between (1) the appreciation of the student as he reads, and (2) the student's power to reflect his appreciation in making a rendering into English.

These are two very different things. The art of translation is one of the most difficult, and it is not to be expected that an immature student will prove an adept in this exercise. His rendering is very apt to be more or less impromptu, and very often the translation test is applied primarily in order to find out whether the syntax of a passage is understood. In taking the English produced under these circumstances as a test of the pupil's appreciation of the original the critic is going far afield.

In at least the four ways above indicated the student who can read his classics in the original has an advantage. But, as previously pointed out, the case for the study of Latin rests only in part upon this cultural argument. The values arising from the study of Latin are various, and the case for Latin rests upon them all, forming thus a *cumulative* argument which the adversary will find it hard to discredit.

With the college situation the reformer is not at present much concerned. His attack is centered upon our citadel, namely Latin in the schools; and if he is successful in carrying the works at that point, he has very good reason to suppose that within a short time the study of Latin generally will fall off to a point where it will little interfere with his ideals and plans for the work of the schools and colleges.

So far as the colleges are concerned, the proposal to study the classics in translation often originates with a friend of the classics or even with the professor of Greek himself. The proposal naturally concerns Greek much more nearly than Latin. A thorough understanding of various literary forms must be based upon a knowledge of Greek literature; and since so few students can or will study Greek in the original, it is plausibly argued that the knowledge of literary form must be brought to the many indirectly, if at all. Hence the call for a course in English translations of Greek authors.

If, in response to this call, courses in translations of Greek authors are to be set up, there are two considerations that should not be overlooked. In the first place, it is no easy task to conduct

courses of this sort successfully; something more is required than to supervise the student's reading. The instructor must be a man steeped in his subject and able to pass along some of the divine fire through the force of his personality; and unfortunately there are not many such. In the second place, there is the ever-present danger that courses of this sort will undermine what still remains of the study of Greek authors in the original, and that the Greek instructor will haply find himself virtually a small wheel in the department of English.

Unless the work can be conducted upon a high plane of success, it were better not attempted at all. Undergraduates are keen observers; and though they may flock to the support of a course that seems to offer "easy credit" (mathematics without a knowledge of mathematics, Greek without a knowledge of the original, etc.), still they are pitiless in assigning to the proper category a course that does not serve a real purpose. To minimize the danger of undermining the regular work in Greek, special care should be given to the kind of translations used. For courses of this kind, it is the spirit rather than the letter that needs translation; and it is sometimes possible to find a paraphrase that would serve the purpose better than a more literal rendering, at the same time leaving something to be worked out by the students able and willing to cope with the original. Such, for example, is Frere's rendering of several of the plays of Aristophanes.

For college courses based on the translation of Latin authors there is less demand and less justification, partly because Latin literature is in such a degree imitative. Certainly such courses should not be set up without most careful previous consideration of their possible prejudicial influence upon the position of the Latin language in the curriculum of school and college.

H. C. N.